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ABSTRACT

This paper recommends that poetry rather than other literary forms be used to teach creative reading and writing to young children. The advantages of using poetry are described as follows: inhibitions are overcome quickly; opportunities for a wider range and more complex level of student achievement are created; high quality pieces of writing are composed in a reasonable time; penmanship, grammar, spelling and syntax are mastered; and sensitivity, social acceptance, and a sense of self worth are developed. The paper also includes basic directions for implementing a creative writing/reading program, suggestions for encouraging a playful atmosphere in such a program, and a set of six creative writing lesson plans. (AEA)

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# Creative Writing/Reading Program for Elementary School Children

As veteran teachers you already know that Art Linkletter was right: Kids say the darndest things. Hearing them is one of the great joys of teaching. Not having a tape recorder running at the time is one of its great sorrows. Like professional writers most children have uninhibited moments of shocking candor, times when they make startling connections or invent outrageous fictions which are truer than they know.

Children are certainly more willing than most of us to challenge conventional wisdom and propriety--more willing to play. As adults we have been conditioned into that dreary stage of life called maturity. In our serious, work-a-day world, play is a subversive activity; it seems an inconvenience, an interference with meeting our responsibilities. We have been asked to save play

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for those small corners of our lives when we are off duty. But children are always ready to play--with objects, with words, with ideas, and with our patience.

Willingness to play is the essence of any creative process. The creative act can occur on the creaking hardwood floors of an auditorium stage, at the sharply tinkling keys of an upright piano, before an easel gaudy with tempera paints, in a laboratory full of Florence Flasks or sitting at a flip-top, Juicy-Fruit-studded desk holding a tooth-marked number-two pencil and a blank sheet of unruled paper. All these are occasions for play.

Children are like artists of all kinds in their readiness to dream, to pretend, to distort. This is what accounts for the special, unconventional angle of vision from which they see the world and so reinvent it. I am <u>not</u> at all sure that creativity can be taught. But my experience convinces me that as teachers we can control circumstances by which it can be encouraged to break out and shine. If we can get children to share their creativity with us, not only is it more likely to be nurtured and preserved in them, but we can all delight in seeing things more freshly and honestly through their eyes. We can be reawakened to a sense of mystery and possibility and wonder. Very often these are more pleasurable states than knowing.

T.S. Eliot describes the function of poetry in this way: "Poetry...may help to break up the conventional modes of perception...which are perpetually forming, and make people see the world afresh, or some new part of it. It may make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world."

I believe that. But as a child I did not like to read poetry, especially in school. It was filled with archaic words like alas, canst, thinketh, twain, and yonder or bookish Britishisms, so that a perfectly ordinary American word like been had to be pronounced bean in order to rhyme. I also disliked the sentiments lurking in collections of poems for school children: They struck me like a lump of cotton candy right between the eyes--sticky sweet, fluffy and rose colored--a phony cloud of preciousness which soon dissolved into airy nothing. And I did not like writing poetry in school because I was told that all poems rhyme. Consequently, I had to crack my brain over finding rhyming words, and the rhyming words then dictated what I could say. What was left to say I did not truly feel. I hope this is a happy confession to those of you who have grown comfortable with the idea that English Professors were memorizing Petrarchan Sonnets at age six and asking their parents for briefcases as Christmas gifts.

Alfred North Whitehead speaks of education as a balance between freedom and discipline. Without the freedom, students have no passion for what they learn; without the discipline, they are only dilettantes. Traditionally poetry reading and writing has been taught in our educational system purely as a discipline like mathematics or geography, only with moral overtones as heavy as the chords of a church organ swelling the refrain to a familiar hymn. Students are taught to stress syllables, count out metrical schemes and label them dactylic hexameter or anapestic tetrameter; to recognize rhyming patterns that distinguish ottava rima from heroic cantos; to distill the process of the poem into an unambiguous and uplifting moral message often stated as a cliché.

How ironic! Poetry is the genre of literature which holds out the most opportunity for freedom to discover new ideas and to create innovative forms by which to express them. Historically, poetry has been the primary vehicle by which the literary artist experimented with radical concepts and unconventional structures by which they might be made more vivid and moving. The most influential poets have tried to break up the conventional modes of perception which threaten to reduce human behavior to mechanical reflex and trite expression. I think this is the chief value of poetry within our culture.

Poetry offers unparalled opportunities for play, for recreation which results in re-creation. For this reason I recommend that

anyone who wants to teach creative reading and writing to young children begin with poetry rather than other literary forms. Furthermore, I suggest that they begin by emphasizing the opportunities for freedom in making poems and then move gradually toward the discipline, which informs and makes that art effective. The discipline, which provides the necessary educational balance to freedom, should be saved for a second stage, otherwise it will inhibit the free play of the imagination, without which there is no second stage worth having. You can't have a brilliant brainstorm without allowing some lightning to flash.

When you release students from a set of rules for writing poems, which must seem as capricious and destructive to pleasure as the path of a tornado, you overcome their inhibitions more quickly. Moreover, when you begin with poetry rather than stories or essays or reports, you create opportunities for a wider range and more complex level of student achievement. Because poetry requires fewer words used in a greater variety of ways than other literary kinds, students can compose a piece of writing of high artistic quality in a reasonable time and be proud of it, and you can teach a broader spectrum of educational objectives. Eventually, in teaching poetry writing through both freedom and discipline you can help students master penmanship, grammar, spelling, prefixes, suffixes, root words, phonemes, connotation and denotation, balance

and symmetry, analogy, logic. You can help children learn to develop a more sensitive awareness of the world around them, show them how to express their feelings in a socially acceptable way, enhance their sense of self worth, develop in them the capacity to entertain themselves, and teach them to read more perceptively. (Makes you breathless, doesn't it?) If this seems like an extravagant claim, we only need remember that for some cultures everything that is known is summed up in stories and songs.

I list these objectives only to give you a sense of the range of what can be taught in poetry writing classes. I encourage you to select (or, better yet, to discover) your own. Of course, underlying all this talk of educational objectives is a simple discovery that I have made: Creative writing encourages creative reading. These two activities are mutually reinforcing. A child who wrestles with the problems of expressing himself clearly to others--touching and moving them by establishing a unique perspective or creating an exciting plot or dramatizing a mood vividly or making someone else see or hear or smell something more freshly--becomes a more receptive and perceptive reader. This is not a matter of learning to read into a text what is not there but learning to read out of a text more of what an author has put there. In turn,

the more perceptive reader becomes a more effective writer. And this circle becomes a creative, re-creative cycle.

I hope that you are now at least willing to entertain the idea of establishing the climate of freedom which will lead to creativity and begin this educational cycle--which grows to resemble a cornucopia. But you may be wondering what practical steps you can take to do so. Here are some strategies that have worked for me. In combination they act as cues signalling an atmosphere where play is encouraged.

Let children:

1. Help themselves to unlined paper.
2. Select pens from a collection of ones with different color washable inks.
3. Sit or kneel or lie or stand anywhere in the classroom including the window ledge (first floor only, please) and under the desk.
4. Temporarily forget about correct spelling, punctuation and standard English sentence patterns. Save these for doing a finished draft. This is a rough draft, right? So, let it be rough.
5. Forget about rhyming and prescribed meters.
6. Choose their own subjects and forms for poems; you should provide a variety of suggestions, but let them choose or invent their own.

7. See you working on your own poem while they are working on theirs. You should try to sweat, erase frequently and give off a mysterious, heroic smile of self satisfaction like the Mona Lisa.

But let's back away briefly from the creative moment itself in order to put it into perspective. Here is what my entire creative writing/reading program looks like reduced to a set of basic directions in proper sequence:

1. State clearly the primary goal or objective of the lesson and why you believe it is important for you and for them. (You do this anyway, right?)

2. Read aloud an example of the writer's behavior which you want the students to master. Praise it; tell them why you like it. Ask them questions about it to see if they have grasped the objective and recognized the example.

3. Design and participate with them in some physical or mental exercise which will help establish the lesson and its importance. If the exercise is physical, it also provides a change of pace.

4. Design a writing assignment (with some element of choice) which connects to the example read and the exercise performed and is a chance to practice the behavior you are teaching. Do the assignment yourself while they are.

5. After the first ten or fifteen minutes of writing time,

display a cheerful interest in what students have written and a willingness to help anyone who is stuck. Share what you have written with them. Pray that you aren't the one who gets stuck.

6. Offer immediate, specific praise to the student for what he or she has written even if it is very little. Find something that you can praise honestly or at least be sympathetic toward. Offer one or at most two particular suggestions for making the writing even better; threaten to swoon when this is accomplished.

a. Encourage children to read their writing aloud in front of their classmates. Lead the applause. Hug somebody.

b. Collect students' writing and write on each paper what you like about it and how it might be improved. Occasionally, make no suggestions for improvement; instead, declare that it is perfect and you couldn't be any happier. Whenever possible make your written evaluation of the writing a model of the behavior you are teaching: State an observation metaphorically, throw in an arresting image or a playful pun or an unconventional point of view which will stretch the student's imagination further than Jonathan Livingston Seagull soared.

7. If none of this works for you, call Don Kunz collect at 401-792-5931 (English Department, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island 02881) and tell him he is a FOOL. If any of this does work for you, share it with a friend; then, send Don Kunz a poem as payment.

I believe this set of strategies will work for you. If they do, your students will write and read with greater facility, enjoy both and very often feel generally more self confident. To share honest feelings, subversive ideas, and puzzling dreams with others (as writers do) is to make yourself vulnerable. It is about as comfortable as walking down Main Street naked. Ordinary circumstances conspire to make us want to be defensive not vulnerable. But in an elementary school, teachers can establish an extraordinary climate, not only of clear direction but also of affection and approval, which will foster creativity.

I have designed for you and will distribute later a set of six creative writing lesson plans along with suggestions for using them and a list of useful books. Each plan uses the steps described above to teach a particular objective. These lessons may be used individually or according to my sequence or a sequence of your own design.

To let you get a feel for how the program works, I invite you to be my class while I teach the first lesson in the series. After that, feel free to look over the whole packet of information and ask questions.

# CREATIVE WRITING/READING PROGRAM FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

Prepared for:

New England Association of Teachers of English
Conference at Wentworth-By-The-Sea
Portsmouth, New Hampshire
October 19-21, 1979

Prepared by:

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Basic Directions for Creative Writing/Reading Program

1. State clearly the primary goal or objective of the lesson and why you believe it is important for you and for them. (You do this anyway, right?)

2. Read aloud an example of the writer's behavior which you want the students to master. Praise it; tell them why you like it. Ask them questions about it to see if they have grasped the objective and recognize the example.

3. Design and participate with them in some physical or mental exercise which will help establish the lesson and its importance. If the exercise is physical, it also provides a change of pace.

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7. If none of this works for you, call Don Kunz collect at 401-792-2576 or 401-792-5931 (English Department, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI 02881) and tell him he is a FOOL. If any of this does work for you, share it with a friend; then, send Don Kunz a poem as payment.

## Suggestions for Encouraging a Playful Atmosphere in the Creative Writing/Reading Program

Let the children:

1. Help themselves to unlined paper.

2. Select pens from a collection of ones with different color washable inks.

3. Sit or kneel or lie or stand anywhere in the classroom including the window ledge (first floor only, please) and under the desk.

4. Temporarily forget about correct spelling, punctuation and standard English sentence patterns. Save these for doing a finished draft. This is a rough draft, right? So, let it be rough.

5. Forget about rhyming and prescribed meters.

6. Choose their own subjects and forms for poems; you should provide a variety of suggestions but let them choose or invent their own.

7. See you working on your own poem while they are working on theirs. You should try to sweat, erase frequently and give off a mysterious, heroic smile of self satisfaction like the Mona Lisa.

## Creative Writing/Reading;

#1 Seeing with the Imagination; Finding a Point of View

Objective: To encourage children to write from their own point of view.

Most of the time we see what we are told to see: This is a pen. This is a book. This is a thumb tack. We have been told what they are and what they are for. And that is what we see.

But if someone points a pen at us, from where we sit it may look like the barrel of a gun. And if someone throws a paperback novel into the air, as we look through our glasses, it may look like a wounded bird fluttering to earth. And seen from far away a bulletin board full of thumbtacks may look like a face full of freckles.

So, sometimes what we see depends upon where we are or what we are looking through or what we are thinking about or what we want to see. Not only are our eyes different shapes (some like almonds, some like marbles) and different colors (blue, brown, green) but they are connected to different hearts and brains and imaginations.

We see things differently because we are different people.

When we use our imaginations to help us see, wonderful things happen: Far away things look to be closer; strange things look familiar and comfortable. Close things look far away; familiar things look strange and mysterious.

Like looking through telescopes, sunglasses and microscopes, looking through our imaginations helps us see things differently, helps us see more, fills our world with variety and makes it more interesting. Seeing with your imagination is exciting!

Example: Read a poem packed with original metaphor or simile or written from a startlingly unconventional point of view. For example: Imamu Baraka's "Young Soul", Marge Piercy's "Simple Song", Robert Bly's "Looking into a Face" or Wallace Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird"--all in Moore and Thurman's To See the World Afresh.

Exercise: After providing materials and showing the children how to do it, tell them: I want each of you to make an ink blot. Decide which side is the top; write your name above it. Write down what you think it is below it. Pass it to the person on your right. Now take the other person's ink blot and turn it around several times. Write down what you think it is. Pass it on to your right. When five people have written on each blot, pass it back to the owner. Now look at your ink blot. Can you see all of the other things your ink blot looks like? Why did different people see different things?

#1 (cont).

Assignment: Ask the children to take another sheet of paper and to write a poem about seeing. It doesn't have to rhyme but it should have a shape. Suggest that they invent their own shape or consider using something like one of these:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| On its side it looks like... | | Maura sees... |
| Upside down it becomes... | OR | Linda sees... |
| But right side up it is... | | Jeff sees... |
| | | I see... |
| | | Conclusion about seeing... |
| | | |
| Seeing is... | | Green eyes see... |
| Seeing is.... | | Blue eyes see... |
| Seeing is... | OR | Brown eyes see... |
| Etc. | | Eyes shaped like almonds see... |
| | | Etc. |

Alternative Learning Exercise: Have the children look through various perspective altering devices--binoculars, smoked glass, a hollow tube, sunglasses, bottom of a water glass, eye glasses, a halloween mask. After they have had a chance to see how these transform a familiar world of common objects into a more mysterious place, design a writing assignment around this strange, altered world.

#2 Restoring the Flow of Sensation with Words

Objective: To help children recognize that effective writing appeals to the five senses.

Have you ever been reading a mystery story and felt your heart start to pound faster? Have you ever been reading about ghosts and felt the hair stand up on the back of your neck or your arm grow goosebumps? Have you ever been reading about baseball and smelled the grass and heard the crack of the bat and felt the dust of the infield in your eyes? Why does this happen? What do words do to you? Why are these stories so exciting?

Words in stories and poems can make you see and feel and taste and smell and hear--just like you were there living in the poem or the story. They can put you in touch with, in sight of, in hearing and tasting and smelling distance of places, people and things that you might not have ever heard of before. But something does not have to be far away for you not to know very much about it. It might be something very close by that you have never really explored--like an ear of corn or a balloon.

#2 (cont.)

Example: Read a poem or story packed with sensory appeal, e.g., Jean VanLeeuwen's One Day in Summer. Then you might play a word game with them in which you ask them to outdo the author by suggesting how things feel or smell or look. For example: What does the sand feel like on your bare feet? (warm, cold, smooth, rough, sharp, ripply, squishy). What does the sun look like? (yellow, orange, red, pale as a slice of lemon in your ice tea, like an egg yolk, like a tennis ball, like my mother's face blushing).

Exercise: Split the class into groups of three to five each. Have a member of each group reach into a shopping bag and pull out a fruit or vegetable from a mixed collection that you have gathered. Then each group works independently. You give the following directions:

1. Pass the fruit or vegetable around your group five times. Pause after each pass and write down your impression of it in a word or two.
2. Pretend that you don't know what it is. Turn it around. What does it look like?
3. Run your fingers over its skin. Break it open. How does it feel? How is the inside different from the outside? Why do you suppose it is different?
4. What does it smell like?
5. Break off a piece and have a nibble. How does it taste?
6. Hold it up to your ear (or what is left of it). If it could make a noise, how would it sound? What would the noise mean? Invent a word which imitates the noise.

Assignment: Write anything that you want to write but put into it at least one taste, smell, feeling, sight and sound. Whoever reads what you write should be able to experience what you say with his senses. Think for a few minutes; then, if you need suggestions, see me.

Suggestions:

1. You are writing a letter to a friend in a strange foreign land (make up a name). You are explaining to him/her what the object you explored is like because it doesn't grow in that strange land.
2. Pretend the fruit or vegetable that you explored isn't what it is. What is it? Pretend that you have just invented it and you are trying to get a grocery store manager to stock it on his shelves and sell it. Why should he?
3. You are a talk show host. Your first guest is this piece of fruit. Ask it some questions; invent its answers.
4. Make a riddle by describing how each of the five senses would size up this piece of fruit or vegetable. Reveal what it is in the last line of the riddle. Write the last line upside down.

## Creative Writing/Reading

### #3 Using Metaphor and Simile and Personification

Objective: To help children state ideas figuratively, to connect the abstract to the concrete.

When we see things differently from other people, sharing what we see with them is difficult. We can help them understand our point of view in at least two ways. We can explain by using the five senses, by telling them how what we have seen tastes or smells or sounds or feels or looks. Or we can compare the strange or unusual thing that we have seen to something they can recognize. Today we are going to work on comparing.

Example: Read a story or poem packed with simile or metaphor or personification. You might use Bo[illegible]ing and Dillon's Whirlwind is a Ghost Dancing, choosing the following short poems and introducing each with a question:
How do you explain what the winds are like? Read Iroquois poem.
How do you explain what winter is like? Read Iroquois poem.
How do you explain what icicles are like? Read Bella Coola poem.
How do you explain what the sun is like? Read Crow poem.

Exercise: Arrange different pairs of words which can be used to generate figures of speech. Ask the children how each pair is alike. Help them turn their statements into figures of speech. For example:
Horse/Lawnmower--
The horse mowed the lawn.
The lawnmower ate the grass.
The horse chugged across the lawn.
The lawnmower galloped across the field.
Fish/Boat--
The boat swam silently against the tide.
The fish steamed powerfully against the current.
Thick scales of rust flaked from the boat.
The fish anchored itself to the rock.
Lamb/Cloud--
The lamb wore a fluffy cloud of wool.
The cloud looked fleecy.
The lamb drifted across the meadow like a cloud.
The cloud grazed across the sky like a lamb.

Assignment: Write a poem with comparisons in it. For example:
1. Write a Tall Tale. You are a strange creature. How big are you? How strong? How fast? How friendly? How scary? Exaggerate like crazy, e.g., "I am so strong that when I sneeze I make tornadoes" or "My nose is as long as a ski slope at Sugarbush."
2. Write a poem about your favorite animal. Ask it questions. Let it explain to you how it feels to be what it is, to live like it does.

#4 Giving Writing a Shape

(For this lesson I suggest varying the sequence of events: Begin with the exercise and derive the objective from it).

Exercise:

1. Bring in an old fashioned balance scale or a postage scale. Ask children to try to keep the two pans of the scale in the air with the proper weights. What does it take? What happens when balance is lost?
2. Arrange an obstacle course on the floor with books or small pillows or erasers. Have children grab one foot and hold it in the air then hop through the course on one leg. Ask them if it was hard? How did they feel when they got through it? How did they feel if they fell down?
3. Bring in a board the size of a balance beam (4"x4"x6'); put it on the floor. Ask children to walk across it carefully. Tell them to pretend it is a bridge across a canyon 1000 feet deep with sharp rocks and a foaming white river below. Careful! Don't fall! If you fall, scream (softly) all the way down.
4. Get a mirror and a piece of charcoal. Draw a line down the center of your face. Ask students to look at your face and tell you what they see on either side of the line.

Objective: To help children understand that shape arises from symmetry or balance and variations on it.

What can you learn from all these exercises? Keeping your balance is fun because if you do, you can get where you want to go. Losing your balance is fun, too, if you don't fall hard enough to hurt yourself. Losing your balance is fun because you go faster and you go somewhere that you hadn't counted on.

Things that look alike or have the same weight are balanced.

Example: Read poems or stories that are filled with balanced or parallel structure. Write some on the chalkboard and ask students to identify balance points and how they are achieved. Then do an asymmetrical poem for contrast. For example here are portions of poems by three of my students. Can you see how lines are balanced and where the balance is lost? Can you see how the balance gives them shape?

"My legs are as soft as a banana.
My fur is as black as a dark night.
My feet are sparks."
(Brian Ferri)

"I am so big I can see past Heaven.
I am skinnier than a piece of hair."
(Jimmy Scott)

"The seasons are something
Very Odd.
They change like the leaves
In Autumn."
(Julie Langham)

#4 (cont.)

The following poems from Moore & Thurman's To See the World Afresh also make good examples: Lucille Clifton's "In the Inner City", Ryuichi Tamura's "Suddenly--Sunset", Langston Hughes' "The Negro Speaks of Rivers".

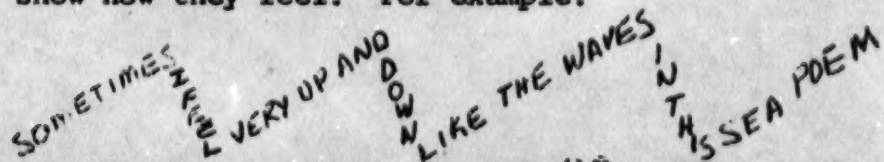
Assignment: Write a poem that has a shape. Practice getting the lines balanced and then sometimes breaking the balance. It might be interesting to write about a place that is special, a place that is like nowhere else, perhaps a secret place. It might be the edge of the cliff on Ocean Drive in Newport near the Breakers. It might be under your bed at home; it might be inside a fort that you built in your backyard. Tell me what it is like. How do you feel when you are there? Help me to see or smell or feel what it is like.

After you have written it down, go back and try to shape it up. How can you make the lines balance? Is there one spot where you can break the poem's balance like snapping a trap door open on the one who reads it?

Alternative Exercise and Assignment: Often when children are asked to write, they prefer to draw a picture. You can capitalize on this preference by having them write shaped poems. You might want to tell them that if they were from Japan or China, they would very easily write in word pictures. For example:

Sun Tree Dawn (Sun tangled in Tree)

Americans have to break a few rules to make word pictures. They have to bend letters and words out of shape: G O S L O W. GOFAST. O P. F
H P U A
L page and
L. the
They have to let sentences twist and turn all over
let them end wherever they want
rather than always at the same edge of the paper.
They have to use words like alphabet blocks to make shapes.
Good examples may be found in Robert Froman's Street Poems and Kenneth Koch's Rose, Where Did You Get that Red? I suggest that you ask students to think of some happy or sad feeling that they have had and to make a poem about it in some shape that helps to show how they feel. For example:



#5 Making Music from Words

Objective: To illustrate that poetry gives pleasure through sound as well as sight and meaning.

If poetry is read purely for a moral message to which it can be reduced, much of the fun of reading it is lost. Poetry works on us most fully when read aloud.

Words are sounds. Those sounds can be just noise or they can be music. We can make music from words by repeating words that sound alike.

Example: Words can sound interesting even when they mean nothing at all. Consider the song of the Jabberwocky from Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking Glass:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

Other illustrations of musical sounding poems may be found in: Brewton and Blackburn's My Tang's Tungled, Merriam's It Doesn't Always Have to Rhyme, Merriam's Finding a Poem. Whatever you read should be read aloud slowly and you should exaggerate examples of rhyme, alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeia.

Exercise: Have the children gather around you while you write at the chalkboard. Ask them to name word pairs that sound alike at the end. Write these rhyming words down and underline the similar endings. Then ask the children to think of word pairs that sound alike at the beginning. Write down these examples of alliteration, underlining the initial consonants. Then ask the children to name word pairs that sound alike in the middle; write these down and underline the vowels that sound alike. Ask the children what a frog sounds like, a dog, a chicken, a pig. Write these examples of onomatopoeia down, noting that these words have been invented not to mean something but to sound like something. Ask them to invent words that might sound like the noise that comes from a typewriter, a book being opened for the first time, a car starting on a cold morning, etc.

Remind them that these are four different ways of making music with words and that generally the easiest way to make poems musical is to repeat similar sounds--some at the beginning, some at the end and some in the middle of words.

Assignment: Write a poem which sounds musical. Here are some possibilities:

1. Make up a musical nonsense poem like the song of the Jabberwocky. Invent your own words that sound alike at the beginning or middle or end.

#5 (cont.)

2. Pick some type of weather that you like (snow, rain, hail, sleet, cloudy, sunny, windy) and write a poem about it which is filled with sound. Make up some words which imitate the variety of sounds made by this weather--especially when you hear the weather when you are standing in different places.

#6 Making Words Count

Objective: To illustrate that poems can be written about ordinary things in a few ordinary words.

Most people think poetry is hard to understand, complicated; that it is written with only special (poetic) or difficult words; that it is written about only very unusual things. Such an attitude prevents us from reading much less writing poetry. If that happens we miss an opportunity to gain pleasure and understanding.

Typically, poems make each word do more than other forms of literature. Words not only mean but can help give a poem a shape and can give it a particular musical sound: these are three ways in which words are made to count in poems. But one of the easiest ways to make words count in writing a poem is to use very few of them, so a reader will have to pay careful attention to each one.

Example: I suggest reading three poems by William Carlos Williams and asking questions following each poem:
"This is Just to Say"--See how short the lines are? See how small the poem is? See how it is about one thing? Have you ever done something that you were supposed to feel sorry for but didn't?
"The Locust Tree in Flower"--See how each line is just one word? See how the words don't make a sentence but just act like different brush strokes to make a word picture in your mind?
"Between Walls"--See how the lines look alike? See how short they are? See how few words are used? Have you ever thought that something supposed to be ugly is beautiful?

Haiku also make good examples. You will probably want to write a few of these short poems on the chalkboard for children to look at or use as models.

Exercise: Do a group poem at the chalkboard. Have children suggest a common object like a coatrack or a curtain. Then ask them to call out single words which they associate with that object. Compose a poem of single word lines. Some examples appear below.

#6 (cont.)

| The Curtain | The Fan | The Coatrack |
|---|---|---|
| Always | Whirring | Shiny |
| Hanging | Spinning | Dependable |
| Around. | Flashing | Metal. |
| You | Buzzing | All |
| Come | Propeller. | The |
| When | Cool, Man! | Coats |
| I | | Hang |
| Pull | | Around |
| You. | | You. |

Assignment: Write a poem which is short, simple, and about one thing. Use ordinary words. Use as few words as possible.
1. Write a poem in which you apologize for something that you are really secretly glad that you did.
2. Write a poem about something ordinary that you see. Don't use sentences. Make each line a single word that gives a sense of what the thing is or does.
3. Write a poem about something that is supposed to be ugly but which you think is beautiful. Use a few ordinary words; you don't have to put them into sentences unless you want to.

## Useful Books for the Creative Writing/Reading Program


Belting, Natalia, Leo Dillon and Diane Dillon. Whirlwind is a Ghost Dancing. New York: Dutton, 1974.

Brewton, Sara, John E. Brewton and G. Meridith Blackburn. My Tang's Tungled and Other Ridiculous Situations. New York: Crowell, 1973.

Ciardi, John. Fast and Slow; Poems for Advanced Children and Beginning Parents. Boston: Houghton, 1975.

Dunning, Stephen. Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle. New York: Lothrop, 1967.

Froman, Robert. Street Poems. New York: McCall, 1971.

Hughes, Ted. Poetry Is. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967.

Koch, Kenneth. Wishes, Lies and Dreams; Teaching Children to Write Poetry. New York: Chelsea House, 1970.

_____. Rose, Where Did You Get that Red? New York: Random House, 1973.

Larrick, Nancy, comp., Crazy to be Alive in Such a Strange World; Poems about People. New York: Evans, 1977.

Merriam, Eve. It Doesn't Always Have to Rhyme. New York: Atheneum, 1964.

_____. Finding a Poem. New York: Atheneum, 1970.

Miles, Miska. Somebody's Dog. Boston: Little, Brown, 1973.

Moore, Lilian and Judith Thurman, eds. To See the World Afresh. New York: Atheneum, 1974.

O'Neill, Mary. Fingers are Always Bringing Me News. New York: Doubleday, 1969.

VanLeeuwen, Jean. One Day in Summer. New York: Random House, 1969.

Williams, William Carlos. The Collected Earlier Poems. New York: New Directions, 1966.

_____. The Collected Later Poems. New York: New Directions, 1967.

Worth, Valerie and Natalie Babbitt. More Small Poems. New York: Farrar, 1976.